

When I got back to my seat after intermission at the **Keith Richards** concert last Tuesday and saw the guy in the white headband in the seat in front of me who like most of the audience missed **Soul Asylum's** opening set, I knew it was all over. Of course the audience stood up when Keith came on stage (which is something I've never understood about rock concerts since it makes it twice as hard to see and being someone who would always rather sit than stand) and the guy in the white headband proved what I suspected -- he was a casualty. A casualty of what I'm not sure, but a casualty none the less. A casualty to the point that he was totally oblivious to anyone else around him. One of the first to stand, he immediately went into his act which consisted of jerking around so when you finally found a good sight-line he'd immediately move in front of you, but worst of all was his insistence on clapping along loudly totally out of time. I knew it was hopeless and wished I had some James Bond kind of weapon so I could off him right then and there.

Richards was in good form and good spirits, opening with a raucous version of Eddie Cochran's "Somethin' Else" before concentrating heavily on songs from his latest album *Main Offender*. Songs isn't exactly accurate -- the music is actually grooves built around guitar riffs with words slapped on top. Unfortunately many of these "grooves" are quite similar which meant the show tended to get bogged down at times which wasn't helped by the infuriating sound mix which alternated between being crystal clear and extremely muddy. Bobby Key's sax was often hard to hear.

Still there were plenty of highlights: "Locked Away" from Richards' first album, a thunderous "Gimme Shelter" (though Sarah Dash's background vocal sounded like a weird synthetic instrument) and "Wicked As It Seems" were played with power and force.

My favorite moment was when Dash sang "Time Is On My Side" in a pull-out-all-the-stops gospel-influenced arrangement. Holding notes forever, she was truly magnificent in a performance worthy of any R and B revue and Richards was with her every step of the way, complimenting her vocal with tasteful, soulful and passionate guitar work and adding his ravaged voice to the chorus.

Another memorable moment was "Hate It When You Leave," the Al Green flavored ballad from his new album. Richards made it obvious that he enjoys the song and his band responded with a precise arrangement.

The other high points were the most predictable: "Eileen," (the catchiest song from the new album) and two of the songs he sings lead on with the Stones, "Before They Make Me Run" and "Happy."

Richards would do well to include more Stones songs or other covers that he likes in his shows. The sameness of the material from his solo albums diminished an otherwise great concert.

Soul Asylum opened with a proficient, no-nonsense short set of songs from their latest album *Grave Dancers Union*. Starting at a high energy level they never let up with "Runaway Train" a standout. Musically it was the best I've seen them. However, they have to learn the difference between performing in a theater and playing a club.

Mick Jagger's new solo album *Wandering Spirit* (Atlantic) easily surpasses the previous two (which some would contend isn't saying much). Still, it's a surprisingly strong effort, probably because Jagger is sticking to music he not only knows but is good at instead of trying to be trendy.

Echoes of classic Stones songs pervade the album making it quite

accessible, along with forays into the various musical forms the Stones have experimented with over the years from delta blues to funk and country. Missing is the special fire the Stones at their best can generate, but the backing musicians avoid sounding generic and Jagger for the most part stays free of vocal excess.

Most impressive are the ballads. The beginning of "Don't Tear Me Up" recalls "You Can't Always Get What You Want," and it builds in a similar fashion, even featuring a hot guitar break in the middle by Jimmy Rip that's not dissimilar to Keith Richards' break on the earlier tune. Jagger delivers one of his most moving vocals in years. In the same caliber is the country influenced "Wedding Gown." The Stones' previous attempts at country were usually done in a half-joking manner, but Jagger sings this one straight (as straight as he can anyway) and it works.

The title track is reminiscent of *Beggars Banquet*, both musically and lyrically. It starts and ends with a lone country blues riff that frames a full-blown gospel rocker.

Much of the remainder of the album alternates between the kind of hard rockers and soul-inspired tunes Jagger can sing in his sleep except for the two closing tunes. "Angel In My Heart" is a nod to such classically influenced songs as "Lady Jane" and "Ruby Tuesday," and the one time the arrangement is overblown.

"Handsome Molly" is a traditional sailing song. Backed only by a Celtic fiddle, Jagger's vocal is refreshingly straight.

Jagger's commitment to the material is an encouraging sign from this most jaded of rock stars.

Paul McCartney also acknowledges his musical past on his new *Off The Ground* (Capitol), but is not nearly as successful. McCartney's problem as usual is his penchant for cuteness combined with his apparent inability to write a meaningful song. He strains for social significance spouting hippie platitudes of loving the earth and loving each other and misses drastically.

McCartney still has an undeniable gift for melody. His ideas and musical arrangements often border on brilliant. He can obviously still play and sing, but he seems to have no idea what to do with that talent. The fact that much of the music sounds like his work with the Beatles only makes it worse.

Only three songs, the slightly catchy "Hope of Deliverance" and the ballads "I Owe It All To You" and "Wide Dark Open Sea" have any redeeming value. The rest of the album is pure fluff led by the ridiculous "Biker Like An Icon." If McCartney could forget how cute he is, he might again make some great music. Given his two recent TV appearances, that seems an impossibility.